THE MATHER PAPERS

COTTON MATHER

AND

SALEM WITCHCRAFT

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THE MATHER PAPERS.

The papers of the Mather family, collected by Rev. Thomas Prince, and constituting one of the treasures of the "Prince Library," have been for many years in the custody of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Selections from them are now printed in the Collections of the society,* under the editorial care of Rev. Chandler Robbins, D.D., chairman of the committee of publication. As these papers cover nearly the first century of our New England history, their publication is an especial favor to those engaged in the study of that interesting period.

The celebrity of the Mather family is surpassed by that of no other in the annals of the Massachusetts Colony. The name, descending through a succession of father, son, and grandson, at each remove from the parent stock, filled a larger

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space in the history of the times. Richard Mather, who came over in 1635, had four sons educated for the ministry at Harvard College, when all the previous graduates of the college did not number four score. Samuel and Nathaniel settled in England, Eleazer at Northampton, where he died at the early age of thirty-two, and Increase, the youngest son, became pastor of the Second Church in Boston, and married Maria, daughter of the excellent John Cotton. His son Cotton Mather, the most noted, learned and irrepressible person of his day, was born in 1663 and died in 1728. The "Mather Papers" are a collection not only of the letters written by the Mathers themselves, but also of those received by the family for three generations, and from more than a hundred different correspondents. In reviewing the contents of this volume we regret that our space will permit us to notice but few of the interesting passages we have marked.

We have here the touching letters by which the regicides, Goffe and Whalley, who in 1664 found a refuge in the house of Rev. Joseph Russell, at Hadley, communicated with their families in England. Whalley was an aged man and quite infirm. Goffe was younger, and he married Whalley's daughter. Increase Mather was the medium through whom the letters were transmitted. The names and relation of the parties were disguised in order that the letters might be unintelligible, in case they fell into the

hands of the English government. Goffe was Walter Goldsmith, and his wife Frances Goldsmith. He addressed her as "Deare Mother." Her letters were to her "Deare Child." Their children were his "sisters." Goffe spoke of his father-in-law as his "friend" or "partner." Their place of concealment was "Ebenezer." Money was freely contributed for their support in the colony as well as from England. Richard Saltonstall, when he sailed for England in 1672, left £50 for their benefit. Indeed they had more money than they could use. Goffe notified his wife of an over-supply in this obscure manner: "You will perceive how the Lord is pleased to "send in supplies for the carrying on of a little "trade here among the Indians, as the present "stock of N. E. money (between my partner and "myself) is somewhat above £100, all debts paid. "Therefore pray speak to Mrs. Jaines [Mrs. "Jane Hooke, his aunt, with whom his wife and "children resided] not to send any more till she "be desired from thence."

The collection contains no letter of Whalley's, and this is explained by the following postscript to one of Goffe's letters: "Your old friend, be-"ing asked whether he desired anything more to "be added concerning himself, he saith, 'I desire "'nothing but to acquaint myself with Je: Chr: "'and that fullness that is in him for those that "'believe and have interest in him.' This sen-"tence he uttered with some stops, yet with more "freedom and clearness than usual."

Here are sentences from his wife's letter, with her spelling:—"Deare childe. I have been abvn-"dantly refreched by thy choych letter of the "10 of Avgvst, as allso by the boock yov toock "the pains to writ for me. I regoyce to heare "that the contry agres so well with yov & that "yov thrye so well, it is the Lords blessing, & tis "marvosly in our Ies. The Lord help vs to svb-"mit to his will, & kep ovr hearts clos to him "self. I have no good nvse to revife yor frend, "bvt that all relations are will. I bles the Lord "yovr sisters [daughters] ar not taken with the "vanitys of the times. Shovrly tobaco is very "good for yovr frend. By reson of the cold if "yov wore a perreweg yov movt inioy more of "the are, if so pray send for one." This excellent woman, so solicitous for their comfort, indulged the hope that she would again meet her husband and father; but she never did. Whalley died in exile in 1676, and Goffe probably in 1680.

Increase Mather, in 1679, wrote to Michael Wigglesworth, minister at Malden, and author of the "Day of Doom"—"with reference unto "a matter wherein yourself is concerned. The "report is that you are designing to marry your "servant mayd, and that she is one of obscure "parantage, and not twenty years old, and of no "church and not so much as baptized." He argues the point with his clerical friend with faithfulness and charming simplicity. Considering her youth, and his age and great bodily

infirmities, it will be a great grief to his relations, his days will be shortened, the ministry will be blamed, and the mouths of the carnal ones will be opened. But to marry one so much his inferior! "The like never was in N. E. Nay "I question whether the like has been known in "the Christian world." He is entreated to put the ignoble object out of his sight, and to look up for supplies of grace that he may be enabled to overcome these temptations. The girl was seventeen years of age, and he was forty-nine. It is quite refreshing to learn that Dr. Mather's advice and warning had the same results which outside interference in matrimonial schemes has today. The indiscreet lover married the girl forthwith, and she doubtless made him an excellent wife. She died at the age of twenty-eight, having blessed him with six children in eleven years. The marriage, so far from impairing the health and reputation of Mr. Wigglesworth, doubtless contributed to both. Five years after his marriage he was offered the presidency of Harvard College,—the prize now dazing the eyes of New England scholars—and his letter declining the honor he addressed in very respectful and affectionate terms to the friend who had volunteered to advise him as to his domestic concerns.

This volume has an especial value for the light it sheds upon the life and literary history of Cotton Mather. It is easy to conceive how one

man could have written the material for more than 382 separate publications such as his (for his son's list does not contain all his published works), but that such a number should have been *printed* is one of the "remarkables" of that wonder-working individual. Of these, 241 may be found in the libraries of the Historical Society, Athenæum, Prince Collection, and American Antiquarian Society. It is to be presumed that the larger portion of the remaining 141 are preserved in other public institutions and in private collections. Of 114 there is but a single copy in all the four libraries which have been named, although none of them has less than 80, and one library has 130. Year after year these books issued from the press at the rate of one a month. In the letters before us we see how the expense of printing them was defrayed. He had no Ticknor & Fields or Little & Brown to assume the responsibility of his publications. They were printed mainly by subscription. He says: "The "booksellers must see forty or fifty pounds en- "gaged before they'l venture on an impression." Again: "The famine of paper creates a difficulty. "But one rheam will print more than 200 copies, "which doubtless may be found in some store- "house or other." These business details he managed himself, and his personal popularity was such that he had troops of friends and patrons to take his books. No one knew ever better than he how to make his friends serviceable. He wishes to bring out his "True Way of Shak-

"ing Off a Viper," and writes to a friend as follows: "Our Patriarch [his father] the last week "read it. It gratified him! It ravished him! "He expressed his desires to have it published. "And his venerable hand will write a preface to "it. But he asked me how I got through the "charges of the impression. I replied, that 'I "'had got at New London a friend, who is better "'to me than a brother. A friend who never "'thought he could overload me with his favors. "'A friend who had several times helped me "'through my designs to serve the kingdom of "'God and the cause of piety. His goodness on "'such occasions is inexhaustible.'" Now for the application: "In pursuance of this declara- "tion, tho' you have so lately assisted my "'Coheleth,' my ink will not blush at it (tho' I "should) if I again grow so very impudent as to "solicit for a little of your assistance towards the "charges of an impression, which may happen "to do some execution towards your *Vipers*, as "well as ours. I know you do but love me and "thank me for all proposals of projections to do "good." The *Vipers* appeared in print a few months later, and were "shaken off," doubtless, by pecuniary means which were furnished by his gracious friend and correspondent at New London.

Cotton Mather relied mainly upon his friends for the means of printing his books. On another occasion he writes to New London: "If your

"good neighbor, and my old faithful, useful and "constant friend, Mr. Green, would venture on "the printing of the little book, I would imme- "diately pay for fifty shillings worth, and after- "wards, if I live, take off some further numbers;" and yet he wrote in his diary that, owing to the largeness of his family, he was literally in rags, and his children were no better arrayed. So far from his personal popularity being injured, much less "wrecked," as Mr. Upham says, by his connection with the witchcraft delusion, his publications were more frequent after that event than before. In the last six years of his life he printed eighty-four books.

When nineteen years of age, he received this excellent advice from his uncle Nathaniel: "By "any means get to preach without any use of, "or help by, your notes. When I was in New "England no man that I remember used them "except one, and he because of a special infir- "mity, the vertigo, as I take it, or some spice of "it. Neither of your grandfathers used any, nor "did your uncle [Samuel] here [in Dublin], nor "do I, though we both of us write generally the "materials of our sermons." Increase Mather wrote his sermons, and committed them to memory. Cotton Mather, in preaching, always had his notes before him, but strove to be as little hampered by them as possible.

We find here evidence of the storm of popular

indignation which burst upon him in 1720 in consequence of his advocating the introduction of vaccination for small-pox. The ministers generally, and he especially, favored inoculation, basing their arguments on medical science. The doctors, with one exception, opposed it with the utmost vehemence, on theological grounds. The ministers and the lawyers had stood in about this relation respecting the legality of the witch trials. During the small-pox excitement, a hand grenade was thrown into his window, which fortunately did not explode. At this period he writes: "A spiteful town and poisoned country "can't extinguish my poor studies to do good in "the world." "Connecticut cannot be more "abusive and distasteful to you than all New "England is to me."

COTTON MATHER AND SALEM WITCHCRAFT.

No historical event of New England history has been more misrepresented than Cotton Mather's connection with the Salem witchcraft trials. He is charged not only with kindling the flame of persecution, but with having instigated the illegal methods in which those trials were conducted, and the barbarities with which they culminated; in other words, that he favored and defended the admission of "spectral testimony," without which no person was, or could be, convicted. That Cotton Mather believed in devils,

and that they were concerned in the strange proceedings in Salem,—that his sermons and tracts on witchcraft (which was then the common belief of mankind) tended to increase the excitement,—that he was credulous and superstitious, even beyond most men of his time,—that he favored an investigation by the civil magistrates, and regarded the judges as honest, conscientious and intelligent men,—cannot be questioned. But he did not believe in hanging people accused by devils' testimony, for such he regarded "spectral "evidence."

There is laid to his charge, in standard books on the subject, the shocking imputation of having raised the storm from motives of personal ambition, "that he might increase his influence over "an infatuated people." "The storm of fanati- "cal delusion he doubted not would carry him to "the heights of clerical and spiritual power in "America and everywhere." (Upham, ii., 867, 503.) He has been accused of hypocrisy and falsehood for making such statements as the following after the trials were over and the community had somewhat recovered their senses:—"I "do humbly but freely affirm it, that there is no "man living who has been more desirous than "the poor man I to shelter my neighbors from "the inconveniences of spectral outcries. Yea, "no one man, woman, or child, ever came into "any trouble for the sake of any that were af- "flicted, after I had once begun to look after

"them. After that storm was raised at Salem, I "did myself offer to provide meat, drink and "lodging for no less than six of the afflicted, "that so an experiment might be made, whether "prayer and fasting, upon the removal of the "distressed, might not put a period to the trouble "then rising, without giving the civil authority "the trouble of prosecuting those things.... Par- "ticular gentlemen in the government know how "many letters I have written to prevent the ex- "cessive credit of spectral accusations."

The last statement, instead of being "artful "and jesuitical" as Mr. Upham terms it (ii., 367), was literally true. The proof we have in the Papers before us (p. 391) in a letter which Mather wrote to John Richards, one of the judges at the Salem trials, and which we have never seen quoted, or even alluded to. The date, May 31, 1692, is significant. The first session of the court was held the first week of June. After one trial and conviction the court took a recess till June 29, when more persons were convicted and nineteen were executed. The letter was therefore written before any trials were held, and before the advice of the Boston ministers, which was asked by the judges during the recess in June, was given. This "advice" we shall allude to presently. Cotton Mather writes, May 31, to John Richards, thus:—

"And yet I must most humbly beg you that in

the management of the affair in your most worthy hands, you do not lay more stress upon pure specter testimony than it will bear. When you are satisfied, or have good, plain *legal evidence* that the demons which molest our poor neighbors do indeed represent such and such people to the sufferers, though this be a presumption, yet I suppose you will not reckon it a conviction that the persons so represented are witches, to be immediately exterminated. It is very certain that the devils have sometimes represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous.

"I would say this: If upon the bare supposal of a poor creature's being represented by a specter, too great a progress be made by the authority, in ruining a poor neighbor so represented, it may be that a door may be thereby opened for the devils to obtain, from the courts of the invisible world, a license to proceed in to the most hideous desolations upon the repute and repose of such as have yet been kept from the great transgression. *If mankind have thus far once consented unto the credit of diabolical representations, the door is opened!* Perhaps there are wise and good men that may be ready to style him that shall advance this caution a *witch advocate;* but in the winding up, this caution will certainly be wished for."

The ministers' advice to the judges (Hutchinson's Mass., ii:52) was dated June 15, and is

of the same tenor. That paper was also drawn up by Cotton Mather, as he states on several occasions. Several of the passages in each are identical. We quote one of the eight sections from the "advice:"

"We judge that, in the prosecution of these and all such witchcrafts, there is need of a very critical and exquisite caution, lest by too much credulity for things received only on the Devil's authority, there be a door opened for a long train of miserable consequences, and Satan get an advantage over us; for we should not be ignorant of his devices."

It is to be regretted that Mr. Upham in his elaborate work did not find space to print "the advice of the Boston ministers," which he knew was drawn up by Cotton Mather, and which, in a note, would not have taken half a page. Its absence is the more noticeable, as he has space to print page after page of Mather's private diary written thirty-two years later, in which there is no allusion to Salem witchcraft. The former indeed might have shown the Boston ministers, and Mather in particular, in a light not in harmony with the author's coloring; while the morbid regrets expressed in the latter—that the diarist had fewer friends than he thought he deserved, and that he was not elected president of Harvard College—may suggest to some readers that this neglect was the penalty of his

advocacy of "spectral testimony" in the witch trials.

We have not the space here to exhibit other evidence in our possession that the position of the clergy of New England in relation to the witchcraft trials has been erroneously stated. If the responsibility, which pertained to the whole community, must be laid upon any one profession, it must rest, in our opinion, primarily upon the lawyers. The minds of the judges were chained to the dogma of "spectral evidence" to the last. When juries ceased to convict on such testimony, and a reprieve was sent to seven who had been condemned, Chief Justice Stoughton left the bench in a huff, and did not return. The medical profession also took a zealous interest in these trials. They examined the bodies of the accused, and testified to teats, witch marks and excrescences which betrayed a league with the devil.

The Salem barbarities were not stopped by an abandonment of the popular theory of witchcraft, but by a reformation in the methods of conviction. Calef, Brattle and Paine, to whom is awarded the credit of superior intelligence, and of turning the tide against the delusion, in their strictures upon the excesses committed by the use of devils' testimony, admit the validity of witchcraft itself. They make no arguments against spectral accusations which are not stated

with greater force in Increase Mather's "Cases "of Conscience concerning Evil Spirits," prepared at the request of the ministers of Boston, while the trials were going on, finished October 3, 1692, and printed seven years before Calef's book was issued. If, in making up his charges against the Mathers and the Boston clergy, Mr. Upham has made any allusion to "Cases of Con- "science," we have failed to discover it. Such a book cannot be ignored in a full and candid treatment of the subject. In the postscript of "Cases of Conscience," the writer states that the views of himself and his son are identical, and expresses surprise that any one should have imagined they were contradictory. He then appends, in full, the advice of the Boston ministers of June 15, 1692, to which he himself subscribed. We are under great obligations to Mr. Upham for his valuable work on Salem Witchcraft; and we beg to suggest that when he issues a new edition he make a reëxamination of the points we have suggested; that he make a more orderly arrangement of his topics; that he divide the work into chapters with headings; that he give us a table of contents; and, by all means, that he give us references to the citations he makes from different authors, so that they can be recurred to if necessary.

The letter of Cotton Mather to Richards, from which we have quoted, betrays the writer's confirmed belief in the reality of witchcraft, and it

contains suggestions growing out of that theory which are absurd and revolting; but in the matter of spectral evidence its advice is clear and decisive. While fighting devils (as he supposed), he was full of compassion for poor, "afflicted" mortals.

We have read this new volume of "Collections" with such a grateful sense of obligation to the accomplished editor for his labors, and to the Historical Society for printing this invaluable matter in such a readable and luxurious form, that we feel disqualified to review it in a critical spirit And yet we cannot forbear to express our regret that the society did not print the whole collection, or give more specific information as to the portion which was omitted. The papers omitted are "such as are much mutilated, "the few which had before appeared in print, "some of those which contain only foreign in- "telligence, and such as possess little or no his- "torical value." The selection, if one was to be made, we doubt not has been made with candor and discrimination; but there is a satisfaction in having the whole of such a collection. Papers mutilated have often great interest, and especially when the mutilation was made by design. The editor might have informed us what papers had already been printed, and where they were to be found. Quite a number of papers containing foreign intelligence are printed, and others, we know not how many, are omitted. There is

often a difference of opinion as to what is of "little or no historical value." Some editors (not Dr. Robbins, by any means) who regard the witch trials as a bore, might have omitted the letter of Cotton Mather to John Richards. The entire collection might, and doubtless would, have filled more than one volume. Then give us two. The papers have been waiting long for a printer, and the second instalment would have kept till the proper time for their publication arrived. In the absence of the complete collection, a schedule of the papers omitted, with the names of the writers, the dates, and a brief abstract or "calendar" of the contents of each, was practicable, and would have been very useful.

Every facility for ready reference to the contents of such a collection of papers should be secured. The volume has an excellent index; but its table of contents needs to be expanded so as to give under the name of the writer, the date, and the name of the person to whom the letter was addressed. We have, for instance, in one line of the Contents simply "Letters of Cotton "Mather." They are fifty-four in number, and fill eighty pages. The index gives the information, without dates, that thirty-three were addressed to John Winthrop of New London. The date is often more important than the name of the person addressed. Again, "Letters and Papers "relating to the Regicides" is all we have to learn the contents of one hundred and four pages. By

turning to "Regicides," in the index, we get but little further information. Such a table as we have suggested would fill several pages, but it would be worth more than the space it occupied, by giving a bird's-eye view of the contents of the volume.

As the editor gives no account of the manner in which the "Mather Papers" came into possession of Mr. Prince, or of their subsequent history, we must infer that nothing is known on these points. And yet it is singular that the records of the Historical Society do not show, as the papers belong to another library, when and how they came into its custody; and that it should be a matter of doubt whether or not they were bound in their present form since they came into the society's possession. As the Prince Library is now deposited in the Boston Public Library, the custody of the papers will, hereafter, be with that institution.

The biographical notes are excellent. We detect but few errors, and some of these might have been avoided if the editor had noticed the corrections in the appendix of Savage's Genealogical Dictionary, and some late works, such as Mr. Whitmore's edition of John Dunton, issued by the "Prince Society." Historical notes, if they had been inserted with more freedom, would have added much to the interest of the volume. "Remembering that their [the committee's] office

"was not that of the historian or the biographer, "but simply of the editor, we have steadily resisted "the temptation to indulge in general illustrations "and comments." This is too modest by half. The editor is a most accomplished historian as well as biographer; and he fails to awaken our gratitude by his self-restraint in resisting the temptation to which he alludes. The Mather family is a subject to which he has for a long period given special attention. Increase Mather and Cotton Mather were his predecessors in the pastorate of the Second Church of Boston. Dr. Robbins in his excellent "History of the Second "Church," 1852, has given the most impartial and discriminating memoirs of these eminent men which have appeared in print. Our regret in reading the volume before us is that we do not oftener see his judicious hand in historical notes.

Since writing the above, we have read the melodious measures of Mr. Longfellow's "Giles "Corey of the Salem Farms." Cotton Mather here appears, not in the guise of a hideous, blood-thirsty fanatic, but as we have endeavored to depict him, a minister of warning to the

magistrates, and an angel of mercy to the accused. To Hathorne, the magistrate, Mather says:—

"If God permits
These evil spirits from the unseen regions
To visit us with surprising informations,
We must inquire what cause there is for this,
But not receive the testimony borne
By spectres as conclusive proof of guilt
In the accused.

"Be careful. Carry the knife with such exactness,
That on one side no innocent blood be shed
By too excessive zeal, and, on the other,
No shelter given to any work of darkness.

"May not the Devil take the outward shape
Of innocent persons? Are we not in danger,
Perhaps of punishing some who are not guilty?"

Over the dead body of Giles Corey the magistrate and Cotton Mather stand. The former says:—

"Behold the fate
Of those who deal in witchcratts, and, when questioned,
Refuse to plead their guilt or innocence,
And stubbornly drag death upon themselves."

Mather replies:

"O sight most horrible! In a land like this,
Spangled with Churches Evangelical,
Inwrapped in our salvations, must we seek
In mouldering statute books of English Courts
Some old forgotten law, to do such deeds?

Those who lie buried in the Potter's Field
Will rise again as surely as ourselves
That sleep in honored graves with epitaphs;
And this poor man, whom we have made a victim,
Hereafter will be counted as a martyr!"

Noble words! and faithful to the impartial record of history! The truth respecting Cotton Mather's connection with the witch trials has slumbered long, and, strange as it may seem to some, the poet is the seer.

